



National Association for College Admission Counseling

Guiding the way to higher education

Effects of the Economy on the Admission Process, 2008-09 National Association for College Admission Counseling June 2009

The 2008-09 college admission cycle took place during a period of heightened economic uncertainty. When added to the annual uncertainty of the admission process—for both students seeking college admission offers and colleges seeking to predict their annual enrollment yield—the economic environment caused great concern among colleges and students about their prospects for Fall 2009. In an attempt to quantify a few basic admission trends for the current admission cycle, NACAC surveyed its high school and college members in May 2009 to find out how their counseling and admission departments, as well as the students they serve, have been affected by the current economic recession.

High School Survey

A representative from each of NACAC's member secondary schools was asked to report on any staff or budget cuts that they faced during the 2008-09 academic year. In addition, they were asked to provide information on any changes in students' application and intended enrollment plans for the current admission cycle. A total of 658 high schools completed the NACAC survey. Although private schools make up only 11 percent of all secondary schools in the US, they comprised 63 percent of NACAC respondents, making the sample highly over-representative of these schools. However, enough public school responses were received to make comparisons by control possible.

Budget and Staff Cuts

- Public schools were more likely than private schools to have experienced both budget cuts (37 percent vs. 25 percent) and staff cuts (14 percent vs. 7 percent), and the average magnitude of budget cuts was higher for public schools (20 percent vs. 14 percent).
- Overall, about 30 percent of secondary schools experienced budget cuts to the counseling department during the 2008-09 academic year, with an average magnitude of 17 percent.
- About 10 percent of all secondary schools experienced counseling department staff cuts during the 2008-09 academic year. The average number of positions lost was one full-time staff person.

Students' College Plans as Reported by School Counselors (see Table 1)

- Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated an increase in the number of students foregoing their "dream schools" in favor of more affordable options. Counselors at public schools were more likely to report an increase compared to those at private schools.
- Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated an increase in the number of students planning to enroll in public versus private colleges in Fall 2009, as compared to Fall 2008 numbers. Thirty-five percent reported no change.
- Thirty-seven percent of respondents indicated an increase in the number of students planning to enroll in community colleges versus four-year colleges.
- Almost 40 percent of respondents indicated that the average number of applications per student had increased from 2007-08 levels. Forty-six percent indicated no change.
- Counselors at public schools were more likely to report changes in student behaviors than those at private schools, including increases in number foregoing "dream school," number delaying postsecondary education, enrolling in public versus private colleges, and enrolling in community colleges versus four-year colleges. In fact, counselors at public schools were three times as likely to report both increases in delay of postsecondary education (25 percent versus 8

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- percent) and community college versus four-year college enrollment (63 percent versus 21 percent).
- Only 15 percent of respondents indicated an increase in the number of students planning to delay postsecondary education for financial reasons. Eighty-four percent reported no change.
 - Counselors at schools with higher percentages of students eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program (FRPL) were more likely to report increases in the number of students delaying postsecondary education or opting to attend a community college instead of a four-year institution.

College Survey

A representative from each of NACAC's member postsecondary institutions was asked to report on any staff or budget cuts that they faced during the 2008-09 academic year. In addition, they were asked to provide information on changes in their admission/retention statistics, including applications, acceptances, waitlist usage, and yield. A total of 402 colleges responded to the NACAC survey. Seventy-one percent of responses to the NACAC survey were from private postsecondary institutions, which is comparable to the proportion of all US institutions that are private (68 percent).

Budget and Staff Cuts

- About 35 percent of postsecondary institutions experienced budget cuts to the admission department during the 2008-09 academic year. The average magnitude of the cuts was 9 percent.
- About 15 percent of postsecondary institutions experienced admission department staff cuts during the 2008-09 academic year. The average number of positions lost was two full-time staff persons.
- Public institutions were more likely than private colleges to have experienced both budget cuts (46 percent vs. 30 percent) and staff cuts (24 percent vs. 12 percent), and the average magnitude of staff cuts was higher (2.5 staff persons vs. 1.5 staff persons).

Institutional Admission/Retention Statistics (see Table 2)

- A majority of institutions reported increases for each of the following: inquiries (62 percent); total applications (62 percent); ED applications (51 percent); and EA applications (68 percent). Public colleges were more likely to report increases for both inquiries and total applications.
- Almost half (46 percent) of colleges reported increases in the percentage of applicants who were accepted. Another 29 percent reported no change.
- Forty percent of colleges that use wait lists reported an increase in the percentage of applicants that were waitlisted, and 40 percent reported no change.
- Forty-one percent of institutions that accept ED applications reported an increase in the number of applicants who declined their ED acceptances because of insufficient financial aid. Fifty-two percent reported no change.
- Forty-five percent of respondents reported a decrease in their 2009 May 1 yield rates as compared to 2008. Thirty-two percent of public colleges reported a decrease, compared to 50 percent of private colleges.
- Forty-six percent of colleges reported an increase in their fall-to-spring retention rates for the 2008-09 academic year when compared to 2007-08. Forty-three percent reported no change. Public colleges were somewhat more likely to report an increase.

Table 1. Percentage of Schools Reporting Change in Students' Behavior During the Admission Process for Fall 2008-09, as compared to Fall 2007-08.

	Apps. Per Student			CC vs. 4-Year			Public vs. Private			Delay College			Forgo Dream School		
	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.
Total	39.2%	46.3%	14.5%	36.9%	59.1%	4.0%	59.6%	35.4%	5.0%	14.5%	83.8%	1.7%	70.7%	27.5%	1.7%
<i>Control</i>															
Public	37.6	45.9	16.5	62.9	34.2	2.9	65.4	28.2	6.4	25.4	72.9	1.7	75.7	21.3	3.0
Private	40.1	46.6	13.3	21.3	73.9	4.7	56.3	39.5	4.2	8.1	90.1	1.7	67.8	31.2	1.0
<i>% Eligible for FRPL</i>															
0 – 25	41.1	45.5	13.4	33.1	63.7	3.3	60.5	34.7	4.8	13.0	85.7	1.4	70.9	27.8	1.4
26 – 50	28.9	44.4	26.7	77.3	20.5	2.3	52.3	38.6	9.1	26.7	73.3	0.0	75.0	20.5	4.5
51 – 75	33.3	44.4	22.2	50.0	33.3	16.7	50.0	44.4	5.6	33.3	50.0	16.7	61.1	33.3	5.6
76 – 100	47.1	47.1	5.9	58.8	35.3	5.9	70.6	23.5	5.9	29.4	70.6	0.0	76.5	23.5	0.0
<i>Region</i>															
Northeast	39.7	49.3	11.0	33.3	63.7	2.9	59.6	37.4	3.0	17.2	80.8	2.0	66.7	31.4	2.0
Midwest	34.2	50.8	15.0	41.2	57.1	1.7	59.3	33.1	7.6	16.2	83.8	0.0	75.4	24.6	0.0
South	41.9	40.8	17.3	28.3	65.4	6.3	56.6	39.7	3.7	6.8	90.1	3.1	70.4	29.6	0.0
West	39.1	45.3	15.6	51.2	44.2	4.7	64.3	27.9	7.8	20.2	79.1	0.8	73.4	21.1	5.5

Table 2. Percentage of Colleges Reporting Change in Institutional Admission/Retention Statistics for 2008-09, as compared to 2007-08 (continued).

	Inquiries			Total Applications			ED Applications			EA Applications			Accepted		
	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.
Total	62.3%	18.0%	19.8%	62.1%	11.2%	26.7%	50.5%	28.4%	21.1%	67.6%	13.5%	18.9%	46.0%	29.4%	24.6%
<i>Control</i>															
Public	71.8	16.2	12.0	71.2	11.9	16.9	50.0	35.7	14.3	81.0	4.8	14.3	39.7	33.6	26.7
Private	58.3	18.7	23.0	58.3	11.0	30.7	50.6	27.2	22.2	64.4	15.6	20.0	48.6	27.7	23.8
<i>Region</i>															
Northeast	57.8	17.0	25.2	53.7	8.8	37.5	44.9	28.6	26.5	69.2	12.8	17.9	47.8	25.0	27.2
Midwest	69.3	16.7	14.0	61.7	13.0	25.2	61.5	30.8	7.7	55.0	20.0	25.0	41.6	38.9	19.5
South	59.4	20.8	19.8	71.0	13.0	16.0	63.6	18.2	18.2	83.8	8.1	8.1	50.0	23.0	27.0
West	64.0	18.0	18.0	68.0	10.0	22.0	36.4	45.5	18.2	40.0	20.0	40.0	42.9	32.7	24.5

Table 2 (continued). Percentage of Colleges Reporting Change in Institutional Admission/Retention Statistics for 2008-09, as compared to 2007-08.

	Waitlisted			Decline ED Acceptance Due to Financial Reasons			May 1 Yield Rate			Fall-to-Spring Retention Rate		
	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.	Inc.	Same	Dec.
Total	39.9%	39.9%	20.2%	41.1%	51.6%	7.3%	35.1%	19.7%	45.1%	45.9%	43.3%	10.8%
<i>Control</i>												
Public	43.6	41.8	14.5	47.6	42.9	9.5	46.2	21.5	32.3	56.6	39.6	3.8
Private	38.4	39.1	22.5	39.8	53.4	6.8	31.4	19.1	49.5	41.8	44.7	13.6
<i>Region</i>												
Northeast	49.4	33.3	17.2	24.5	73.5	2.0	33.3	22.2	44.4	46.6	44.3	9.2
Midwest	33.3	36.1	30.6	50.0	41.7	8.3	36.4	16.2	47.5	42.6	41.7	15.7
South	32.7	53.1	14.3	51.4	37.8	10.8	37.4	20.9	41.8	48.4	42.1	9.5
West	28.6	42.9	28.6	57.1	28.6	14.3	33.3	17.8	48.9	46.7	46.7	6.7